

BS"D

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Class #2: Foundations of Torah, Principals of Faith, and Moshiach (the Messiah)

Lesson #6: **The Function of Mashiach**

This is a section in the book, *I Await His Coming Every Day: Analytical Studies by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson of the Rambam's Rulings on Mashiach and the Ultimate Redemption.*

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Note: This lesson contains some emendations to the source text [the words in square brackets], so our UNA students should study this text for the purpose of the course.

Mashiach: The Ultimate Jewish Monarch

We can appreciate the Rambam's conception of Mashiach, and understand why the two chapters dealing with Mashiach were chosen as the conclusion of "Hilchos Melachim" [section on "Laws of Kings"] and of the "Mishneh Torah" as a whole.[51] The Rambam opens his discussion of Mashiach with the following statement:

"In the future, the King Mashiach will arise and renew the Davidic dynasty, restoring it to its initial sovereignty."

This implies that by restoring the Jewish monarchy, the Mashiach will make possible the complete observance of the Torah and its mitzvos [Jewish and Noahide commandments], as we see from the continuation of the above quotation:

He will rebuild the [Holy Temple - the Beis Ha]Mikdash and gather in the dispersed remnant of Israel. Then, in his days, all the statutes will be reinstated as in former times. We will offer sacrifices and observe the Sabbatical years [in the 7-year cycle] and Jubilee years [in the 50-year cycle] according to all their particulars set forth in the Torah.

The Rambam thus defines Mashiach as a king, who will not only redeem the Jews from exile, but also restore the observance of the Torah and the mitzvos to its complete state. All the elements of Torah observance which were lacking in exile - because the entire Jewish people did not live in Eretz Yisrael and because the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed - will be renewed.

Our faith and our yearning for Mashiach - as the Rambam continues, "Whoever does not believe in him, or does not await his coming..." - should therefore focus not only on his coming, but also on his restoration of the Davidic dynasty and on the complete observance of the Torah and its mitzvos.

In this context, we can understand the Rambam's intent in citing the prooftexts mentioned above for support. The verse that promises the Jewish people that "G-d will bring back your captivity" indicates that there will be an ingathering of the dispersed remnant of Israel. This will make it possible for the Davidic dynasty to be reinstated and for the observance of the Torah and its mitzvos to be restored in its totality.

The Rambam now continues to support the conception of Mashiach as the epitome of Jewish monarchy by citing a prophecy which establishes a parallel between Mashiach and King David. This indicates how Mashiach will "renew the Davidic dynasty, restoring it to its initial sovereignty." Furthermore, this prophecy indicates how the various characteristics of monarchy expressed by King David will be mirrored and amplified by Mashiach.

The above concept enables us to understand why the Rambam continues:

Whoever does not believe in him, or does not await his coming, denies not only [the statements of] the other prophets, but also [those of] the Torah and of Moshe [Moses], our teacher.

With this, the Rambam emphasizes that the conception of Mashiach's coming and the Era of the Redemption which he will bring about, as centering around the complete observance of the Torah and its mitzvos, has its source in the Torah itself. Indeed, it is one of the fundamental principles of the Torah, for there must ultimately be an era in which the Torah will be observed perfectly. Thus, the prophets' description of the Era of Mashiach merely restates and highlights the statements of the Torah.[52]

The Ultimate in Observance

We can now understand why the Rambam devotes a separate halachah to the designation of the three supplementary Cities of Refuge. For this indicates a further state of completeness in the observance of the Torah and its mitzvos, a state that will be reached only in the Era of the Redemption. Not only will the [Jewish] mitzvah of establishing Cities of Refuge [in the Holy Land] be observed as in previous times: it will be observed in a more perfected manner than ever before. The commandment to establish these new cities indicates how the Torah itself points to a future era when the observance of its mitzvos will be complete.

Observance and Miracles

Considering the above, we can understand the continuation of the Rambam's statements in halachah [Torah ruling] 3:

One should not entertain the notion that the King Mashiach *must* work miracles and wonders, bring about new phenomena within the world, resurrect the dead, or perform other similar deeds. This is [definitely] not true.

[A proof can be brought from the fact that] Rabbi Akiva, one of the greatest Sages of the Mishnah, was one of the supporters of King Ben Kosiva ["Bar Kochba"], and would describe him as the King

Mashiach.... The Sages did not ask him for any signs or wonders.[53] [Rather,] this is the main thrust of the matter: This Torah, with its statutes and laws, is everlasting. We may neither add to them nor detract from them.

Two concepts are implied by the Rambam's words:

- a. The [essential] mission of Mashiach is not to work wonders; and
- b. his performance of wonders or his failure to do so should not be used as criteria to establish his identity.

Since the intent of Mashiach's coming is to bring about a complete state of Torah observance, it is out of the question to conceive that he **must** be a miracle worker. If anything, changing the natural order is somewhat in contradiction to the concept that "This Torah, with its statutes and laws, is everlasting." The performance of such wonders should therefore not constitute a means of evaluating whether or not a particular person is in fact Mashiach.

The Criteria for Mashiach

How can we judge whether a person is truly Mashiach? By observing whether or not he fulfills the purpose stated above, the restoration and establishment of the complete observance of the Torah and its mitzvos. In this context, we can appreciate the criteria enumerated by the Rambam in halachah 4 for determining the identity of Mashiach:

If a king will arise from the House of David who delves deeply in the study of the Torah and, like David his ancestor, observes its mitzvos as prescribed by the Written Law and the Oral Law; if he [i.e., by his personal excellence within the realm of Torah] will compel all of Israel to walk in [the way of the Torah] and repair the breaches [i.e., in its observance among the entire Jewish people]; and if he will fight the "wars of G-d" [i.e., thus removing all obstacles to Torah observance in the world at large]; - we may, with assurance, consider him Mashiach [i.e., he is assumed to be Mashiach].

The Rambam then continues:

If he succeeds in the above, builds the [Beis Ha]Mikdash on its site, and gathers in the dispersed remnant of Israel, he is definitely the Mashiach. By this stage, when it becomes possible to observe the Torah and its mitzvos in their totality, the Era of the Redemption will have actually begun.[54]

Four Prophecies: Four Phases of Mashiach

To focus on the Rambam's statements in the first halachah more closely: It can be explained that the four sets of prophecies quoted by the Rambam reflect the four criteria mentioned in halachah 4, as they were exemplified in King David (in a lesser sense) and as they will be exemplified in Mashiach.

The first set of prophecies ("I see it, but not now; I perceive it, but not in the near future") [Numbers 24:17] refers to the very existence of King David and of Mashiach - "A king will arise from the House of David."

The second set of prophecies ("A star shall go forth from Yaakov [Jacob], and a staff shall arise in Yisrael") refers to the activities of King David and of Mashiach in relation to the Jewish people - "He will compel all of Israel to walk in the way [of the Torah]." [Numbers 24:17]

In this, the prophecies referring to Mashiach surpass those referring to King David. "A staff" is a means of asserting one's authority,[55] indicating Mashiach's influence over the people as a whole; "a star," in contrast, merely indicates one's personal greatness. Moreover, the phrase referring to King David speaks of the Jews as "Yaakov", while the phrase referring to Mashiach calls them "Yisrael", [and it is explained elsewhere that it is the latter name which underscores their greatest merits[56]].

The third set of prophecies ("He shall crush all of Moab's princes; he shall break down all of Seth's descendants")[Numbers 24:17] refers to the wars fought by David and to be fought by Mashiach - "[He will] fight the 'wars of G-d.'"

Here, too, we see that the prophecy referring to Mashiach is superior to that referring to David. "Crushing" can be interpreted as referring to a single victory, while "breaking down" implies that one has established and fully asserted one's authority. Furthermore, David will be victorious over "the princes of Moab," one nation, while Mashiach will dominate "all of Seth's descendants," many peoples.[57]

The fourth set of prophecies ("Edom will be demolished; his enemy, Seir, will be destroyed") [Numbers 24:18] refers to the ultimate activities performed by David and Mashiach in the world at large. As halachah 4 concludes,[58] "He will then perfect the entire world, [motivating all the nations] to serve G-d together." This is indicated by the prooftext cited by the Rambam which concludes, "And the sovereignty will be the L-rd's." At that time, all the nations of the world will themselves appreciate G-d's sovereignty and accept Mashiach as king.

May our study of the laws of Mashiach - an active expression of our yearning for his coming - strengthen our faith and hasten his actual coming. And may this take place in the immediate future.

Footnotes:

43. Sanhedrin 99a discusses the proposition that, although there will be an Era of Redemption, this Redemption will not be led by a Mashiach. Instead, "The Holy One, blessed be He, will rule over [the people of Israel] Himself; He will redeem them." By citing the references from Bilaam's prophecies, the Rambam clearly indicates the fundamental nature of the belief, not only in a Messianic Age, but in Mashiach himself. (See also the Chasam Sofer's "Yoreh Deah," Responsum 356, who explains how a person who ascribes to the above-mentioned proposition now, after the Sages have rejected it, "denies the entire Torah.")

49. II Shmuel [Samuel] 7:1, cited by the Rambam, Hilchos Melachim 1:2.

50. See I Divrei HaYamim [Chronicles], chs. 28 and 29.

51. Significantly, in one early printing of the Mishneh Torah, these two chapters appear under the heading "Hilchos Melachim U'Milchamos U'Melech HaMashiach" ("The Laws of Kings and of War, and of the Messianic King").

52. [This conforms with the Rambam's conception of the purpose of prophecy as a whole, as stated in "Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah" 9:2.]

53. [As explained in the essay entitled "Two Periods Within the Era of Redemption," which appears below, the Raavad and other authorities take issue with the Rambam on this point and maintain that Mashiach will work miracles.]

54. See also the letter of the Rebbe Rashab ("Igrois Koidesh" 130) which mentions two phases in the revelation of Mashiach - his activities before the rebuilding of the Beis HaMikdash and the Ingathering of the Exiles, when he will not yet have been crowned as the Mashiach, and his subsequent coronation.

55. See Rashi on the above verse.

56. ["Likkutei Torah," Parshas Balak 70c and the following pages.]

57. Indeed, according to Targum Onkelos [Aramaic translation of the Torah], it refers to dominion over "all nations." This interpretation is borne out by the prooftext cited by the Rambam, "He will rule from sea to sea."

58. This clause concludes the fourth halachah in the printed editions of the Mishneh Torah, which were emended by various censors; the original manuscript version of this halachah is considerably longer.

*****Quiz for Lesson 6*****

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1. What is the purpose and intent of a righteous Jewish king?
2. List some main accomplishments through which Mashiach will make possible the complete observance of the Torah and its Jewish and Noahide mitzvos.
3. Name a Jewish king in the past who exemplified the qualities of Torah-true monarchy.
4. True or False: it is one of the fundamental principles of the Torah that there must ultimately be an era in which the Torah will be observed perfectly.
5. If a person decides to follow the hypothetical suggestion recorded in the Talmud that in the Messianic Era, G-d will Himself alone redeem the Jewish the people and then rule over them, without providing them with a King Moshiach, is this person considered to be a believer in the Torah?
6. (a) Do all the classical Torah-law authorities agree with the Rambam's "Laws of Kings" that there is a possibility that the Moshiach will not perform miracles?
(b) If not, name a classical Torah authority who disagrees with the Rambam on this point.
7. This apparent "disagreement" between classical Torah authorities about the role of miracles when and after Moshiach comes can be resolved by realizing that there will be two periods within Messianic Era. What are these two periods?
8. During which of these two periods in the Messianic Era will there definitely be miraculous changes in the nature of the world?
9. (a) When Moshiach brings the Redemption and is crowned as king of Israel, will the scope of his rulership be limited to the 12 Jewish tribes which will be re-established in their land of Israel?
(b) How far will his rulership extend?